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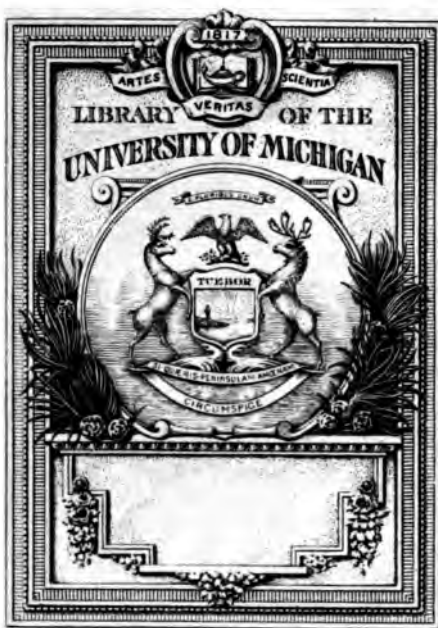
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ÆSCHYLUS.

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ÆSCHYLUS

IN ENGLISH VERSE.

PART I.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES.
THE PERSIANS.

BY

ARTHUR S. WAY, M.A.

AUTHOR OF

TRANSLATIONS INTO ENGLISH VERSE OF HOMER'S ILIAD AND ODYSSEY,
THE TRAGEDIES OF EURIPIDES, ETC.

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THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES.

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B

ARGUMENT.

WHEN *Oedipus*, king of *Thebes*, was ware that he had fulfilled the oracle uttered ere he was born, in that he had slain his father, king *Laius*, and wedded his mother *Jocasta*, he plucked out his own eyes in his shame and misery. So he ceased to be king; but, inasmuch as his two sons rendered to him neither love nor worship, he cursed them with this curse, 'that they should divide their inheritance with the sword.' But they essayed to escape this doom by covenanting to rule in turn, year by year. So *Eteokles*, being the elder, became king for the first year, and *Polyneikes* his brother departed from the land, lest any occasion of offence should arise. But when after a year's space he returned, *Eteokles* refused to yield to him the kingdom. Then went he to *Adrastus*, king of *Argos*, who gave him his daughter to wife, and led forth a host to war against *Thebes*.

And herein is told how the leaguer of the city was brought to an end by a great assault against her seven gates led by Seven Chiefs of the *Argive* host; and how the Curse of *Oedipus* was thereby fulfilled.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ETEOKLES, *son of Oedipus, and king of Thebes.*

MESSENGER.

ANTIGONE and ISMENE, *daughters of Oedipus.*

HERALD.

CHORUS, *consisting of Theban maidens.*

Citizens, guards, and champions attending Eteokles.

SCENE :—On the Acropolis of Thebes, in front of the
temples.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES.

*Daybreak : a crowd of citizens : to them enter
Eteokles.*

ETEOKLES.

O KADMUS' sons, in season must he speak
Who at the state's stern wards the common weal,
Helming her, closing not his eyes in sleep.
For if we fare well—lo, the hand of God!
But if—which Heaven forbid!—mischance befall,
Eteokles only shall all men revile
With clamorous curses everywhere in Thebes,
And groans, whereof may Zeus, Deliverer named,
Be as his name imports to Kadmus' town.
Now must ye—*all*, even he that cometh short 10
Of manhood's prime, each in life's autumn-tide
Still fostering goodly growth of stalwart thews,
No less than all in life's high noon, our fittest—
Champion our Thebes, the altars of the Gods
Of this soil, that their honours ne'er may die,
Our babes, our motherland, most loving nurse;
For when new-born ye crawled on her kind breast,
Your nurture's burden took she all on her,
And reared you, to be loyal citizens
Buckler-arrayed, for this her hour of need. 20

Now, to this present, fortune smiles on us :
 For all this time of our beleaguering
 By Heaven's grace hath our warfare prospered well.
 Now, as the seer saith, watcher of the birds,
 By ears and mind¹ divining, without fire,
 From fowls prophetic, with unerring art,—
 He, lord of suchlike divination, saith,
 ' By the night's council is proclaimed and planned
 A mighty Achaian onslaught on our town.'
 Hence to the battlements and tower-gates 30
 Hasten ye all : rush battle-harnessed on :
 Man ye the breastworks, on the platforms stand
 Of towers, and at the outgoings of the gates
 Abiding, be stout-hearted : fear not ye
 The array of aliens : God shall give good speed.
 Scouts have I sent forth, spies upon their host—
 I ween they do not loiter on the way ;—
 By these warned, shall I not be caught with guile.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

two Eteokles, mighty King of Kadmus' folk,
 With tidings clear from yonder host I come, 40
 Who have myself beheld the things they do.
 For seven heroes, squadron-captains fierce,
 Over a black-rimmed shield have slain a bull,
 And, dipping in the bull's blood each his hand,
 By Ares and Enyo, and by Panic

¹ The prophet Teiresias was blind, and so practised divination, not from inspection of victims, or observation of altar-flames, but from the cries of birds, and the sound of their flight.

Lover of blood, have sworn to raze to earth
Our walls, and sack with violence Kadmus' burg,
Or, dying, with their hearts' blood steep her soil.
Love-tokens for their parents in far homes
To Adrastus' chariot¹ hung they, shedding tears: 50
But no relenting was there on their lips;
For iron-souled their heart aflame with courage
Panted, like lions glaring battle-wrath.
Nor falter they to put to proof the issue;
But casting lots I left them, that, as each
Drew, against each gate he should lead his troop.
Therefore the city's mightiest chosen men
Plant at our gates' outgoings with all speed;
For now the Argive host all battle-dight
Dust-veiled is drawing nigh: white-gleaming foam, 60
From mouths of horses dripping, flecks the plains.
Thou then, like heedful helmsman of a ship,
Make all sure, ere the War-god's hurricane-blast
Burst—hark, the roar, the land-surge of their host!
Seize then the time that earliest shall serve;
And, for the rest, mine eye shall be a scout
Trustworthy: by clear tidings learning all
Yon foes' designs, shalt thou be fenced from harm.

[Exit.

ETROKLES.

O Zeus, O Earth, O city-warding Gods,
O Curse, thou mighty Erinnys of my sire, 70
Uproot ye not in utter ruin Thebes
Spoiled by her foes—this town which speaks the
tongue
Of Hellas, and these hearths of Hellene homes!

¹ He only was destined to return home alive.

But keep the land free, and 'neath thralldom's yoke
 Suffer ye never Kadmus' burg to bow.
 Be her defence!—for your names' sake I pray;
 For 'tis the prosperous town that honoureth Heaven.

[*Exit.*]

Enter Chorus, tumultuously.

CHORUS.

In anguish exceeding awful I cry!
 Yon host is unreined—from the place of their camp-
 ing
 On-flooding the vanguard-steeds come tramping! 80
 I know by the dust that soars heaven-high,
 A tongueless herald that cannot lie.

Lo, the plains of my land re-echo the knell
 Of hoofs in mine ear—on the wind comes a roaring
 As of torrents resistless o'er hill-scaurs pouring.
 O Gods! O Goddesses! hearken!—repel
 The on-rushing peril, the mischief fell!

Rings over our rampart the onset-cheer:
 On charges the host with their white shields gleam-
 ing,
 Unswerving on to the city streaming! 90
 Who, who shall bring our deliverance near?
 Of Gods, of Goddesses, who will hear?

Ah, shall I, even now, in suppliance falling, bow
 To the statues of the Gods, the protectors of our
 land?
 O ye Blessèd, throned in bliss, it is time to clasp and
 kiss
 Your images—why tarry we, a loud-lamenting band?

Did ye hear it—hear the clang as the smitten bucklers
rang ? 100

Bring out the costly vestments, with the flower-
wreaths draw near.

When, save now, on-bearing these, shall we chant our
litanies ?

Ah ! how plain the clang !—the clashing of many
and many a spear !

Thou, who from of old dost ward our Thebes, O
Battle-lord,

Thou, wilt thou now forsake her, the land that is
thine own ?

God of the Golden Helm, look down upon thy realm,
On the city from of yore for thy well-belovèd
known !

(*Str. 1.*)

Ye whose arms overshadowing enfold us,
Gods, come, stoop hitherward all ! 110

Pure maidens beseech you—behold us,
Save us from thrall !

Round the city the war-tides sway ;
Helm-plumes are their flying spray
By the War-god blown to the fray.

Zeus, All-controller, uphold us !
Our Father, let Thebes not fall !

For the Argives engird the city 120

Of Kadmus : their arms clang fear :
The bits of their steeds clash clear

A death-knell—death without pity !
And in spear-proof mail chiefs seven,
As their stations by lot be given,
To the gates draw near.

(Ant. 1.)

O Warrior-maid, Zeus' Daughter,
 Save, Pallas! Thy trident be, 130
 Lord of the ocean-water

And of chivalry,
 Our deliverance from terrors! And thou
 For Kadmus' sake turn now
 Battleward, Ares, thy brow!
 Oh, our ancestress, Kypris, from slaughter 140
 Shield us!—thy blood are we!

We draw nigh thee with prayer and strong crying.
 Such as Heaven-abiders attend.

Wolf-king, as a wolf do thou rend
 Yon foemen: assuage thou our sighing.
 Child of Latona, thy quiver
 Make ready: thy suppliants deliver—
 Queen-huntress, befriend! 150

(Str. 2)

Round the city the roar of many a rattling car,
 Queen Hera, I hear!

The naves of the massy axles with griding jar
 Shriek, Artemis dear!

Winnowed with spears mad moans the tormented air!
 What chasm of doom before Thebes yawneth there?
 What end—woe's me and alas!—do the Gods prepare?

(Ant. 2)

The slingstone-sleet our battlement-summits hath
 skimmed,

Apollo, our Lord!
 In our gates is the clashing of bucklers brazen-
 rimmed:— 160

Yet from Zeus the award
 Of the struggle shall come, the righteous issue of fight.

Blest Queen, be thou to the burg seven-gated a light
Of deliverance—Onka, thou rescue thine home in thy
might !

(*Str.* 3)

Gods all-sufficient, bringers of salvation,
Who ward our towers alway,
Leave it not for a spoil, this war-worn nation,
To alien array ! 170
Hearken, while with pure hands of supplication
Your maidens pray !

(*Ant.* 3)

Gods, Thebes' defenders, in her tribulation
Your love for her display.
Care for her temples, shrines of adoration ;
Be ye their strength and stay.
On those burnt-offerings of propitiation 180
Think ye this day !

Re-enter Eteokles.

ETEOKLES.

Yourselves I ask, ye spawn intolerable,
Is this well?—makes it for deliverance
Of Thebes, for heartening of her leaguered host,
To cower by statues of our guardian Gods,
With shrieks, yelps,—things which decency abhors ?
Nor in misfortune nor prosperity
May I be housemate with these womenfolk !
In power, their arrogance can none abide ;
In fear, they are ruin to the state and home. 190
Yea, now by this wild panic have ye filled
The citizens with spiritless cowardice.
Ye give our foes all aid that in you lies !
We from within are ruined by ourselves !

Such gain shall thine be who with women dwell'st !
 If any hearken not to my command—
 Man, woman, or aught intermediate,—
 Sentence on him the shard of doom shall pass :
 The folk shall stone him ; he shall not escape.
 Foes for the man : let woman meddle not 200
 With such : make thou not mischief, bide within.
 Hast heard, or not ? —or speak I to the deaf ?

CHORUS.

(Str. 1.)

Dear Oedipus' scion, I quailed to hear
 The thunder, the thunder, of chariots near,
 When the naves of the whirling wheels were
 screaming,
 And the fire-forged bits, the helms of fear,
 In the restless mouths of the war-steeds gleaming.

ETEOKLES.

What then ?—by craven flight from stern to prow¹
 Findeth the mariner deliverance
 When in the sea-surge laboureth the keel ? 210

CHORUS.

(Ant. 1.)

But I, to the ancient statues I fled
 Of the Gods, when the sleet of the death-snow dread
 Roared in our gates : putting trust in their pity
 I cried in my fear to the Blessed, to spread
 Their shield of protection over the city.

¹ Leaving the helm to pray to the images of guardian-gods which were set up in the prow.

ETEOKLES.

Pray that our towers repel the spear of foes.

CHORUS.

Will not our Gods assure this ?

ETEOKLES.

Say not men

That all her Gods forsake a captured town ?

CHORUS.

(*Str. 2.*)

Oh, not while I live may the Gods that stand

Here gathered, depart, nor be Thebes beholden 220

In turmoil of panic, by foeman's brand

All flame-enfolden !

ETEOKLES.

Be thou not traitress by thy cries to heaven !

Obedience, mother of good speed, is wedded

Unto Divine protection, saith the saw.

CHORUS.

(*Ant. 2.*)

But the might of the Gods is higher than all.

Yea, oft in affliction this upraises

The helpless from woe, when it hangs as the pall

Of a cloud o'er their faces.

ETEOKLES.

Men's part is this, to offer sacrifice

230

Unto the Gods, when foes essay our wall ;

Thine, to keep silence, and abide within.

CHORUS. (Str. 3.)

By the Gods' grace, ours is a city unquelled,
And the throng of her foes have our towers repelled.
At this what jealous Power is offended?

ETEOKLES.

I blame thee not for honouring the Gods ;
But, lest thou cause the people's hearts to faint,
Be still, and be not overmuch afraid.

CHORUS. (Ant. 3.)

At that strange clashing, in panic-affright
Of huddled confusion, up to the height 240
Of the citadel's hallowed abode I ascended.

ETEOKLES.

Do thou not, if thou hear of dying men
Or wounded, greet them with wild wailing cries ;
For on such panic Ares batteneth.

CHORUS.

Ah !—yes, I hear the snortings of the steeds !

ETEOKLES.

Take heed, lest hearing thou too plainly hear.

CHORUS.

Deep groans the city by her foes beset !

ETEOKLES.

Suffice that I take counsel for all this.

CHORUS.

I fear !—loud grows the battering at the gates !

ETEOKLES.

Silence !—say not this in the city's ears. 250

CHORUS.

Conclave of Gods, forsake our towers not !

ETEOKLES.

A malison on thee ! Endure in silence !

CHORUS.

Citizen-gods, from thraldom save me—save !

ETEOKLES.

Thou bringest me, thyself, and Thebes to thrall.

CHORUS.

Turn on our foes that shaft, almighty Zeus !

ETEOKLES.

Zeus, what a curse thy gift of woman is !

CHORUS.

Ay, wretched—even as men whose town is ta'en.

ETEOKLES.

With cries ill-boding dost thou clasp their statues ?

CHORUS.

Yea, my heart fails, my tongue is thrall to fear.

ETEOKLES.

Wouldst thou but grant one small boon at my
prayer— 260

CHORUS.

Name it with all speed, and I straight shall know.

ETEOKLES.

Be silent, cowering wretch ; daunt not thy friends !

CHORUS.

I am silent : with them will I bear my doom.

ETEOKLES.

Rather I choose this than thy former strain.
And, furthermore, letting yon statues be,
Pray for the best, that Gods may champion us.
Give ear to this my vow ; thereafter raise
The sacred pæan, the auspicious cry,
The Hellene rite of sacrifice-acclaim,
To hearten friends, to banish dread of foes. 270
Lo, I unto the Gods that ward our land,
That haunt our plains, that watch our market-stead,
To Dirké's fount, and to Ismenus' streams,
Vow, for good speed and for our city saved,
With blood of sheep to stain their altar-hearths,
And sacrifice of bulls, and so uprear
Our trophies, and with raiment of our foes,
With spear-won spoils, to drape their hallowed fanes.
In such strain to the Gods pray, not with moans
Poured forth, nor yet with sobbings vain and wild ; 280
For none the more shalt thou escape thy fate.
But I will go, and station champions six,
Myself the seventh, at our seven rampart-gates,
There to confront the foe heroically,
Ere hurrying messengers and urgent words
Come, and by stress of need set all aflame.

[*Exit.*

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

I heed thee, yet no rest
Hushes mine heart oppressed :
Fears riot in my breast

With fiery wrestlings.

Yon leaguer of the spear

290

I dread, as cushats fear

Snake-nestmates drawing near

Unto their nestlings.

Ranks, squadrons, nations, all

March on against our wall—

What shall to us befall ?

Each warder-station

Is stormed at with sharp stones—

300

Oh Zeus-born Heavenly Ones,

To Kadmus' burg and sons

Send down salvation !

(Ant. 1)

What goodlier land shall be

Henceforth your home, if ye

Yield to an enemy

For spoil, for slaughters

This, and our Dirké's spring ?

Such flood nor Ocean's King

Did e'er from earth's womb bring,

310

Nor Tethys' Daughters.

God-warders, thrill dismay

Through these : let their array

Death-doomed cast shield away

In panic flying.

So grant this folk renown ;

So, marble-throned, look down

On this war-ransomed town,

Who heard her crying.

(Str. 2)

Alas, that Hades-ward, spear-spoiled, be thrust 320

This burg of olden fame,

That Gods should suffer her, in crumbling dust

Enslaved, to slake the Achaian's murder-lust,

Wasted with shame !—

Whose women thraldom-ward a rude hand forces,

Matrons and maids unwed

Haled with rent vesture by the hair, as horses

Caught by the mane are led—

And shrieks the city fast dispeopled, while 330

With wails tumultuous forth her children file—

‘ Dire doom for you I dread !’

(Ant. 2)

Alas, that maids, whose girlhood scarce hath fled,

On paths of miseries

Should, ere the spousal rites, from home be sped !

Shall I not count the portion of the dead

Better than these ?

Yea, for the city which a foe o'erpowereth

Meets manifold ill doom. [340

Folk are dragged captive : here the sword devoureth,

And there the flames consume.

Smoke-smirched is all the town : the Lord of Death

Withers the fear of God with his mad breath,

A nation-blasting fume.

(Str. 3)

Through all the stricken city tumults reign :

Foes tower-like hem her round :

Men turning desperately to bay are slain :

The dying screams resound

Of suckling babes that writhe in mortal pain

Dashed blood-drenched on the ground. 350

Sister of hurrying tumult, rapine raveth :
 Spoiler bars spoiler's way :
To empty-handed reiver reiver waveth
 A hand—' Come, share the prey !'
Yet he nor less nor equal portion craveth—
 Can speech the rest portray ?

(*Ant.* 3)

Down mid the dust earth's fruit, a mingled store,
 Hands of the wasters hurl :
The housewife's eyes behold, in anguish sore,
 Where down the wild flood whirl 360
Earth's precious gifts, confused with refuse, o'er
 Destruction's eddy and swirl.
And wretched captive maids now first are learning
 What thralldom's horrors be,
When the triumphant foe, with fierce lust burning,
 Gloats o'er their agony.
' Come, night of death !' they moan, with anguished
 yearning,
 ' From misery rescue me !'

HALF-CHORUS I.

Yon scout, meseemeth, from our war-array
Comes bearing us some tidings, O my friends, 370
Speeding his hurrying feet like chariot-wheels.

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Lo, here our King, the son of Oedipus,
His coming times to hear the messenger.
His haste withal outrunneth his foot's speed.

Enter Eteokles from right, and Messenger from left.

MESSENGER.

I bring word, from sure knowledge, of our foes,
How each by lot is stationed at each gate.
Now nigh the Proetian gate doth Tydeus rage :
Not yet the prophet suffereth him to cross
Ismenus, for the victims bode not well.
So Tydeus, fuming for the fight debarred, 380
Roareth, as hisses a snake in midnoon heat,
Stabbing with taunts the wise seer, Oikleus' son,
Crying, ' Faint-heart, from doom and fight dost flinch !'
Therewith he shakes the three dark-shadowing crests
That overstream his helm : and 'neath his targe
Bells forged of brass are knelling terror forth.
And his shield bears this arrogant device—
A sky emblazoned, flashing all with stars,
And bright the full moon in his buckler's midst
Shines, queen of all the stars, the eye of night. 390
Thus he in arms vainglorious raving, shouts
Beside the river-banks, afire for fight,
Like steed that pants with fury against the bit,
Straining, the while he waits the trumpet's call.
Whom wilt thou range against him ? Who can
stand
Our champion, when the Proetian bolts give way ?

ETEOKLES.

A warrior's trappings !—Not at such I quail :
No power to wound hath any blazonry.
Crests, bells—they cannot bite without the spear.
And, for this night that on his shield, thou say'st, 400

Is pictured glittering with the stars of heaven—
To him prophetic that conceit may prove.
For, if night fall upon his dying eyes,
To its bearer this vainglorious blazonry
Truly shall prove and justly pertinent,
His prophecy of insult threaten himself.
Against yon Tydeus Astakus' staunch son
Will I for warder of this gate array,
Right nobly born, a man who honoureth
Modesty's throne, who hateth arrogant speech ; 410
No dastard he, but slow to deeds of shame,
Sprung of the old stock, which the War-god spared,
The Sown Men, truest scion of the soil,
Melanippus. Ares' dice shall judge their strife :
But Justice, his blood-sister, marshals him
To ward the land that bare him from the spear.

CHORUS.

The Gods vouchsafe our champion victory
This day, for armed with justice forth he goes
To fight for Thebes. Yet oh, I dread to see
The doom of our defenders, bloodily 420
Slain by their foes.

MESSENGER.

The Gods vouchsafe this man even so may speed !
2 Kapaneus takes by lot the Elektran gate,
A giant champion, huger-framed than that
Aforesaid : more than mortal is his vaunt
With horrors threatening Thebes, which Fate fore-
fend !
' If God will, I will raze the town,' he saith,

‘Yea, if he will not!’—Even the Wrath of Zeus
 To earth down-flashing, should not stay his hand.
 Lightnings and thunderbolts, he cries, to him 430
 Are of no more account than noontide heats.
 His blazon, one unclad who bears a torch :
 Flames in his hands the firebrand ready-dight ;
 And ‘I will burn Thebes,’ golden letters say.
 To meet this man send—who shall close with him ?
 Who, without quailing, shall abide his vaunts ?

ETEOKLES.

Lo, here of vantage is new vantage born !
 For, mark how of the vain conceits of men
 Their tongue becometh true accuser still :—
 Kapaneus threatens, all prepared for deeds, 440
 Flouting the Gods, wagging a blatant tongue
 With vain glee ;—and this mortal heavenward hurls
 Loud billowy-surgings words against high Zeus !
 I trust the flame-wrapped bolt shall find him out
 By Justice guided, nought in semblance like
 Unto the noontide fervours of the sun.
 Against him, be he ne’er so braggart-tongued,
 A warrior fiery-souled is matched, the might
 Of Polyphontes, warder staunch, by grace
 Of Artemis our Guardian, and all Gods. 450
 The next chief name, to the next gate assigned.

CHORUS.

Perish the man who vaunts against our walls !
 Oh, may the bolt of levin blast him here,
 Ere burst his furious feet into mine halls,
 Ere we from maiden bowers be driven, thralls
 Of his proud spear !

MESSENGER.

Now will I name the warrior assigned
To the next gate. For Eteoklus leapt
The third lot from the inverted brazen helm
To hurl his squadron against Neïs' gate. 460
His car-steeds in their trappings snorting loud
He wheels, afire to dash against the gates.
In guise barbaric do their nose-bands pipe
Filled with the breath that from their nostrils blares.
In pompous fashion blazoned is his shield :
A man-at-arms ascends a ladder's steps
To a tower of foes, with purpose to destroy,
Shouting by letters ranged in syllables,
' Not Ares' self shall from these bastions hurl me !'
Wherefore, against this man send one whose might
Avails to shield this town from thralldom's yoke. [470

ETEOKLES.

Straight will I send—ha, by good hap already
Forth is one sent who bears in deeds his boast,
Megareus, Kreon's scion, of the Sown,
Who nowise, cowed by noise of steeds that snort
In frenzy, shall flinch back from yonder gate.
Slain, he shall pay our land his nurture-debt,
Or two men and a city on a shield
With blood-stained spoils shall deck his father's house.
Vaunt of another : spare me not the tale. 480

CHORUS.

Champion of Thebes, O grant thou triumph-renown
To our warrior ; rob thou his foes of their hearts'
desire !

Even as proudly they vaunt against our town
 Mad-hearted, so upon them may Zeus look down
 With avenging ire.

MESSENGER.

The fourth, who takes the gate that riseth nigh
 Onka Athena's fane, stands shouting there,
 Hippomedon's grim form and giant mould.
 I shuddered as he tossed the mighty round,
 His targe's circle, I deny it not. 490
 No prentice-hand in blazonry had he
 Who overlaid his shield with that device,
 Fire-breathing Typhon, belching through his lips
 The black smoke, sister unto flickering flame.
 From a foundation-rim of coiling snakes
 Swells the round targe's hollow-arching dome.
 He shouted there ; possessed by Ares, raves
 Like Maenad for the onslaught, glaring death.
 With heed must we beware this man's essay,
 For at our gates already Panic vaunts. 500

ETEOKLES.

First, Onka Pallas, dweller nigh our town,
 Hard by that gate, shall loathe his insolence
 And from her nestlings drive this dragon fell :
 And, as a man to face this man, is chosen
 Hyperbius, Oinops' loyal son, full fain
 To learn his doom in fortune's utmost stress ;
 In goodlihead, in courage, and in arms
 Beyond reproach : Hermes hath matched them well.
 Man shall meet man with all the fury of hate,
 And foes the Gods are who upon their shields 510
 Shall clash in fight : one bears fire-breathing Typhon,

But father Zeus is on Hyperbius' shield
Firm-seated, with his blazing bolt in hand.
And none saw ever yet Zeus overcome.
Even such deities hath each to friend—
We on the conquering side, they on the vanquished,
If Zeus than Typhon mightier proved in fight.
Even so, meseemeth, these two foes shall fare.
Be Zeus Hyperbius' saviour, on whose shield
He sitteth, as accords with his device. 520

CHORUS.

O, I trust that the champion who beareth Zeus's foe
On his buckler, the shape of the demon of darkness
abhorred,
Who is hateful to men, yea, even in counterfeit show,
And to Gods everliving, shall yet at our gates bow
low
His head 'neath the sword.

MESSENGER.

So be it. Now the fifth withal I name,
Unto the fifth, the north-east gate, assigned,
Hard by Zeus-born Amphion's sepulchre.
He sweareth by his spear, wherein he trusts
More than a God for worship, better than eyes, 530
That he in Zeus' despite will waste the burg
Of Kadmus: so the stripling hero speaks,
The mountain-haunting mother's fair-faced son.
Yet through his cheeks the down looks forth but now
When first his spring puts forth close-clustering hair.
In ruthless mood, not like his mild maid-name,
And with grim eye, he stands defying us.
Yea, not without his vaunt he fronts our gates;

For the reproach of Thebes upon his shield
Brass-forged, the orbèd bulwark of his breast, 540
He swung, the ravening Sphinx made fast thereto
With rivets, hammer-wrought, a gleaming shape,
Beneath her clutching one of Kadmus' sons,
So that on him might darts be chiefly showered.
He shall be no mean trafficker in fight,
Nor shall he shame the long path he hath trod,
Arcadian Parthenopæus: and this man,
Alien, yet paying to Argos nurture's debt,
Threatens our towers with—that which God forefend!

ETEOKLES.

After their pride may heaven deal with them! 550
Then shall they perish foully, utterly,
They and those godless vaunts of their own mouths.
For him too, this Arcadian whom thou nam'st,
A man unboastful, of no deedless hand,
Waits, Aktor, brother of the aforementioned chief,
Who shall not suffer a tongue divorced from deeds
To burst within our gates and work us woe,
Nor suffer him to pass therethrough who bears
That loathly monster's semblance on his shield,
Which from within shall chide her bearer loud 560
Clanging with fierce fast battering 'neath the wall.
So please the Gods, this shall be truth I speak.

CHORUS.

Thy tale through my bosom hath thrilled,
And my tresses of hair upstand
For the impious mouths that are filled
With vaunting. May God's own hand
Dash them to death in our land!

MESSENGER.

I name the sixth, a man most temperate-souled,
The warrior-seer, Amphiaraus' might.
He, to the Homoloian gate assigned, 570
Once and again upbraideth Tydeus' might
As murderer, as troubler of the land,
As unto Argos chiefest guide to wrong,
The Erinnys' marshal, minister of blood,
Tempter of King Adrastus to this wrong :
Thereafter to thy brother Polyneikes
Appealing, lifting up his eyes to heaven,
And at the end twice syllabling his name,¹
Arraigns him : this word breaketh from his lips :
' Thy deed is like thy name!—welcome to Heaven, 580
Glorious for after days to hear, to tell,
That on thy father's town, thy country's Gods,
Thou hast brought an alien host, to ravage them !
A mother's blood, what "*Justice*" stancheth it ?
And shall thy motherland, by thine ambition
Spoiled with the spear, be ever thine ally ?
For me, I know I shall make fat this soil,
A prophet buried in a hostile land.
On to the fight ! I look for no base doom.'
So spake the seer, and raised his brazen shield 590
Fair-rounded : blazonry was none thereon ;
For he would fain, not seem, but be, the best,
Who tilleth the deep furrows of his soul
Wherefrom a harvest of good counsel springs.
Against him send antagonists wise and good,
I rede thee. Dread the foe who fears the Gods.

¹ Pronouncing his name with a pause between the first two and the last two syllables, so as to mark its ominous significance—"Poly-neikes : greatly contentious."

ETEOKLES.

Woe for the omen that with impious men
Joineth a righteous man in fellowship!
Than evil converse, in all enterprise
Nothing is worse: its harvest let none reap. 600
Infatuation's field hath death for fruit.
If the godfearing man for shipmates hath
A crew hot-hearted in iniquity,
With that god-hated tribe he perisheth:
The righteous man who dwells with citizens
Traitorous to guests and reckless of the Gods,
Is justly taken in the selfsame net,
Lashed by the same impartial scourge of God.
Even so this seer, even this Oikleus' son—
Just, sober, good, godfearing though he be— 610
This mighty prophet, with the impious joined
Whose shameless tongues shout down their conscience'
voice,
Far-marching to the bourne whence none returns,
Shall, if Zeus will, be dragged down, down with
them.
Yet will he not assail the gate, I trow,
Not for that he is craven or spiritless,
But in this fight he knoweth he must die—
If Loxias' oracles shall bear their fruit.
Yet against him the might of Lasthenes,
Gate-warder stern to strangers, will we range, 620
Who bears a greybeard's brain, but youthful thews,
Who loveth silence, or else timely speech,
Whose eye is swift to mark, nor slow his hand
To snatch from under shield the spear made bare.
But, for success—that is the gift of God.

CHORUS.

Ye Gods, to our prayers give ear !
Grant Thebes to prevail at the last.
Her invaders hurl back on the spear.
May Zeus from our towers' height cast
These, and his levin-bolt blast ! 630

MESSENGER.

The seventh, unto the seventh gate assigned,
Will I name—thine own brother, and the doom
He prays and imprecates upon our town,
That he, the outlaw banned, may scale our walls,
May shout his triumph-pæan over Thebes,
May meet thee, slay thee, yea, beside thee die,
Or upon thee avenge his exile-shame,
Banishing thee as thou didst banish him.
So shouteth Polyneikes' might, and calls
Upon the Gods unto his fatherland 640
Native, right graciously to heed his prayers.
A new-wrought shield, fair-moulded to his arm
He hath, with twofold blazon wrought thereon :
A man in beaten gold, a warrior mailed,
A woman leads, with calm staid mien leads on.
Justice she names her, as the letters tell :—
' I Justice bring this man home : he shall hold
His father's city, and his palace-halls.'
Even such are the devices of yon men.
Thyself advise thee now—ah, *whom* wilt send ?— 650
Well, for false tidings me thou ne'er shalt blame ; .
Thyself advise thee how to helm the state.

ETROKLES.

Oh heaven-frenzied—oh by Gods abhorred !—

Oh lamentable line of Oedipus!
 Woe for my father's curses now fulfilled!
 Yet tears beseem not, nor lamentings now,
 Lest wail have birth yet more intolerable.
 But, for this Polyneikes,—fitly named!—
 Soon shall we know what comes of that device,
 If gold-wrought letters flaunting on his shield, 660
 And witless-wandering phantasms, home shall bring
 him.

If ever Justice, virgin child of Zeus,
 His deeds or thoughts companioned, might this be:
 But neither when from darkness of the womb
 He leapt, nor with his childhood, nor his youth,
 Nor when the beard 'gan cluster on his chin,
 Hath Justice looked on him or deigned to own.
 Nor in this outrage on his fatherland
 Will Justice stand beside him now, I ween.
 She were misnamed, right justly should one say, 670
 'Justice,' consorting with the reckless-souled!
 Trusting herein will I go forth myself
 And meet him:—who hath better right than I?
 As chief meets chief, brother shall brother meet,
 And foe meet hated foe. Thou, bring with speed
 Greaves, spear, and shield, my fence from storming
 stones.

CHORUS.

Dearest of men—O son of Oedipus,
 Be not in mood like him, the evil-named!
 Suffice that hand to hand Kadmeians close
 With Argives: sacrifice may expiate this. 680
 But death of brothers slain by brother-hands—
 Never the stain of this pollution fades.

ETEOKLES.

This, could I suffer wrong without disgrace,
Might be. The one prize in death's hand is honour.
But wrong with shame!—there is no glory there.

CHORUS. (Str. 1)

Wherefore so eager, my son? Oh let Atê, the demon
of wrath
Mad for the battle, not hurry thee ruinward! Spurn
from thy path
Evil desire in the bud!

ETEOKLES.

Since Heaven thrusts the deed with fury on,
Abhorred by Phoebus let all Laius' line 690
Drift helmless to its bourne, Cocytus' wave!

CHORUS. (Ant. 1)

Lust for revenge as with fangs of a serpent is stinging
thee, son,
On to a murder whose fruit shall be bitterness, stinging
thee on
To accursèd outpouring of blood.

ETEOKLES.

Ay, for accomplished now, my father's curse,
Hard-eyed and tearless, sitteth at my side
Whispering of gain better than death deferred.

CHORUS.

(Str. 2)

Ah, be not vehement! Craven shalt thou never be in
 men's eyes,
 Holding with honour to life: nor in blackness of
 storm from the skies
 Down on thine halls the Erinnyes shall swoop, when
 the sacrifice 700
 From thine hands shall the Gods receive.

ETEOKLES.

The Gods!—long since they ceased to care for us,
 And marvel at gifts from lost ones such as we.
 Why should I cringe to melt the heart of doom?

CHORUS.

(Ant. 2)

Nay, while thou mayest, O do it! Thy fortune, as
 storm-blasts may veer,
 Yet from her purpose of fury may change, and, though
 late she appear,
 Come as with balmier breeze, as with lulling of
 billows draw near.
 Now still doth her wrath-surge heave.

ETEOKLES.

Yea, high the curses surged of Oedipus.
 Too true my visions were of phantoms seen 710
 In sleep, dividers of my father's wealth.

CHORUS.

Ah, yield to women, though thou love them not!

ETEOKLES.

Ask that which may be granted: briefly ask.

CHORUS.

Tread not this path to guard the seventh gate.

ETEOKLES.

I am whetted steel : thy words shall blunt me not.

CHORUS.

Yet victory yielded God despiseth not.

ETEOKLES.

No warrior mailed may to such words consent.

CHORUS.

Wouldst pluck for triumph-wreath a brother's life ?

ETEOKLES.

So the Gods grant it, doom he shall not 'scape.

[Exit.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Ah, I shudder at the God who hath blasted yon
abode—

720

God ungodlike, yet unerring, evil-boding, whom the
prayer

Of a father by its spell drew, a Fury, up from hell
To fulfil the curse of Oedipus, his wrath of mad
despair:

And the feud that blasts his children ever thrusts
the demon on.

(Ant. 1)

And the steel of ruthless heart their inheritance shall
part ;

The alien from the Iron Land shall cast their lot of
doom :

Bitter portioner of treasure, shall the Scythian
stranger measure 730

And allot them land to dwell in—ay, the dead man's
share, a tomb!

But in Thebes' far-stretching lealands lot or
portion have they none.

(*Str.* 2)

When, pierced by a brother-hand,

As men self-slain they have died,

And down through the thirsty sand

To the nethergloom ebbs life's tide,

Who shall loose guilt's fetters enchaining?

Who cleanse from the curse of its staining?

Oh house whereon evils are raining—

740

Ills ancient and new side by side!

(*Ant.* 2)

Ah sin of the olden days!

Ah swift retribution it brought!

To the third generation it stays

Since Apollo to Laius taught,

By Earth's mid-navel oracles pealing

In Pytho for fate's revealing,

That his childlessness life was and healing

For Thebes—yet he set it at nought.

(*Str.* 3)

Overborne by his friends' mad prayer

750

He begat for his own self doom—

Oedipus, father-slayer,

Who sowed in the field of the womb,

In a mother's sacred body,

A seed whose harvest was bloody.

O, madness it was linked there

The infatuate bride and groom!

(Ant. 3)

The sea of calamity brings

A surge three-crested, to soar

O'er the surge that subsides, and it swings 760

O'er our bulwarks with foam-whirl and roar :

And between us and death stands the thickness

Of the wall of one tower, and in sickness

Of fear we cry, ' Thebes with her kings

Shall perish for evermore !'

(Str. 4)

The ship of state that with an ancient curse

Is freighted, beareth heavy merchandise :

The bloated wealth of godless traffickers

Escapeth not when ruin's tempests rise,

But bringeth utter wreck to all their enterprise. 770

(Ant. 4.)

Lo, who of men in such high honour once

By Gods and rulers of our Thebes was held,

And by the thronged assembly of her sons,

As Oedipus, who that death-cloud dispelled

That overgloomed the land, that fiend of ravin quelled ?

(Str. 5)

Ah, when he recognised that bitter bridal—

Woeful for him, in anguish of despair, 780

Maddened in soul, with fingers parricidal

Out of their sockets twain his eyes he tare,

(Ant. 5.)

Hissed at his sons, who cared not to dissemble

Scorn of a king discrowned, his curse—' The sword

'Twixt you shall part your heritage!' I tremble 790

Lest the Avenging Sprite fulfil the word.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Fear not, O daughters yet by mothers nursed.
This city hath escaped from thralldom's yoke.
Abased the vauntings are of violent men.
Still water Thebes hath won, hath shipped no sea
In multitudinous buffetings of surge.
Each tower withstands assaults ; our gates be fenced
With warder-champions strong in single fight.
Yea, well-nigh all is well—even at six gates :
But the seventh gate the awful Lord of Seven, 800
Even King Apollo, chose, in Oedipus' line
To consummate king Laius' ancient folly.

CHORUS.

What new mishap hath lighted upon Thebes ?

MESSENGER.

Heroes lie slain by brother-slaughtering hands.

CHORUS.

Who?—What saidst thou? I am distraught with
fear !

MESSENGER.

Now calm thee—hear : the sons of Oedipus—

CHORUS.

Ah woe is me !—mine heart forebodeth ills !

MESSENGER.

Past all denial, they are stretched in dust.

CHORUS.

There lie they, there?—yet tell the heavy news. 810

MESSENGER.

By brother-hands too surely were they slain.

CHORUS.

To both alike impartial fortune was !

MESSENGER.

She is destroying all the ill-starred line.
Herein is food for joy and tears withal,
In that Thebes fareth well, but those her kings,
The chieftains twain, with hammer-beaten steel
Of Scythia have divided all their wealth :
Yet of this land shall they but gain them graves,
Swept down the flood of their sire's fatal prayers.
Our Thebes is saved ; but, for the brother-kings, 820
By mutual slaughter earth hath drunk their blood.

[Exit.

CHORUS.

O mighty Zeus, O Powers that ward
Our city, even ye who guard
These towers Kadmeian,
Shall I rejoice?—shall I bid ring
Triumphant to our Saviour-king
My thankful pæan?
Or shall I weep the hapless slain,
Ill-fated battle-chieftains twain,
The brother foemen,
Them, whose unnatural strife was stilled
In death, who truly so fulfilled 830
Their names' dark omen?

(Str. 1.)

Woe for the Curse, the black curse self-fulfilling,
 To end the race of Oedipus that came !
 Terror upon my heart lies spirit-chilling,
 And for all song a death-dirge must I frame.
 Ay, for I chant, frenzied with Thyiad-passion,
 A wail o'er them who perished wretchedly ;
 A hymn of evil omen, lo, I fashion
 Now, in the stead of psalms of victory.¹

(Ant. 1.)

A father's curse, with fateful foot that failed not, 840
 Pressed to its goal : fulfilment hath it found.
 Laius at prophecies of warning quailed not ;
 Therefore in trouble's sea our Thebes is drowned.
 Swordlike the Word through man's resistance cleav-
 ing
 Carves out its ends. Woe, princes, for your doom,
 Woe for your deeds, the horrors past believing !
 Anguish and wail in veriest deed are come.

[*Enter procession bearing the corpses of the brothers,
 Antigone and Ismène following*].

(Str. 2.)

Herald of evil, lo, the confirmation
 Comes of thy tale ! Twin fratricides this day
 Dead in our sight ! Such awful consummation [850
 Now hath the curse-doom. What remains to say ?
 What, save to wail the Curse that haunteth ever
 This House, by woes on woes forsaken never ?

(Ant. 2.)

Smite the head now with hands whose oar-like beating
 Speeds over Acheron down the gale of sighs

¹ Adopting Verrall's interpretation.

Ever the bark black-sailed, all shadowy-fleeting
Onward, on unblest embassy that flies
Unto the land unseen of any living,
Sunless, untrodden of Phœbus, all-receiving ! 860

But hitherward on bitter mission, lo,
Ismênê cometh with Antigônê.
Their bosoms o'er their brothers slain, I trow,
Shall pour, with love that knows not friend from foe,
The yearning threnody.
And we, before their cry of lamentation
Peals out, must chant the Avengers' joyless hymn,
Must ringing send the song of desolation
Through Hades' mansions dim.
O sisters brotherless, O sorrow-stricken 870
Beyond all them that wear the clasping zone,
For you my tears unfeigned, my sighings thicken ;
My heart, my heart makes moan.

(*Str.* 1.)

Madmen, whose ears were deaf to interceding
Of love !—hard hearts of hardships all unheeding !
Wretches, whose fury wrecked the ancient home !
Yea, wretches, who have brought a royal house to
nought,
And for yourselves have won a wretched doom !

(*Ant.* 1)

Thou that didst clutch thine home's wall, down to
tear it, 880
Thou that didst clutch the crown, that none might
share it—

A bitter crown for thee !—the sword hath made
Peace between thee and thee : the debt too faithfully
Of that wild Curse the Avenging Sprite hath paid.

(Str. 2)

Through their hearts the steel clave,
 Through the hearts of these slain ;
 Yet one mother gave
 One birth to the twain. 890
 Woe for the Curse that from heaven descended in
 murder-rain !

Even so, even so !
 On these brethren hath come
 A deadliest blow
 To the heart, to the home—
 Brethren estranged by unspeakable hate, by a father's
 doom !

(Ant. 2)

All the city is moved 900
 Unto sighs, her towers groan :
 For her children beloved
 The whole land maketh moan—
 Fair prizes that stirred the ill-starred ones to grapple
 to death for a throne !

With spirits aflame
 To that sharing they turned.
 Lo, their share is the same,
 For the whole though they yearned.
 But the daysman is cursed of their lovers, no thanks
 hath the War-god earned. 910

(Str. 3)

Smitten and carven with iron in such ill plight are
 they lying ;
 And a prize, one carven with iron, for him as for
 him doth abide.

‘ What prize can there be for the dead ? ’ one asketh :
answer him, crying :
‘ Palaces iron-delved in their fatherland, side by
side.’

And the wail far-piercing shall speed them, a home
for a home who are leaving,
Sighing that rendeth the breast, grief from the soul
that springs,
Grief from a torn heart joyless, and tears of unfeigned
grieving :
For my heart is weeping itself away for the twain—
my kings !

920

(Ant. 3)

What praises shall Hadesward waft them, o’er these
forlorn ones pealing ?
Say of him : ‘ Like a hero he battled—ah me, with
his motherland ! ’
And of him : ‘ From his terrible onset the ranks of
the aliens reeling
Heaps upon heaps war-blasted fell ’neath his ruin-
ing hand.’

Woe for the woman who bare them, ill-starred beyond
all other

Was she, yea, more than they all which have borne
the fruit of the womb !

Her son for a husband she took to herself ; she became
their mother !

930

One seed—and such end have they found, who gave
each to his brother a tomb !

(Str. 4)

O yea, of one seed were the twain, of their heritage
made they partition :

In no lovingkindness, nay, but in madness of strife
was it done ;

And their feud's consummation, behold, is their own
and their house's perdition :

Ceased is their hate : in the earth their blood
mingles, the twain are at one.

Oh but in truth are they now *of one blood*, and a
bitter decider 940

Of this their dispute was the oversea stranger that
leapt out of fire,

Even the whetted steel : of possessions a bitter divider
Was the War-fiend who brought to fulfilment the
curse of a father's ire.

They cast lots for their heritage : each hath the share
that the Curse did bequeath them,

A share of the crown—of the crown of sorrows
that Zeus did bestow.

Of the soil that they craved have they plummetless
wealth—in the earth-bed beneath them ! 950

They have set on the head of their house a garland
of manifold woe.

At the last these Curses have shouted the shriek of
their terrible pæan

Over the house that is shattered in utterest disarray.
Ruin's trophy is reared in the gates fratricidal, the gates
Kadmeian.

These two hath the fiend of the house destroyed :
now his hand doth he stay. 960

DIRGE OF ANTIGONE AND ISMENE. (*Pro-ode*).

ANT. Thou thy smiter didst smite.

IS. Thou in slaying didst die.

ANT. Thy spear slew in fight.

IS. Spear-slain dost thou lie.

A. Ah, the struggle!—I. The pain!—A. Oh, I weep
for the slain!—I. For the slayer I cry!

(*Str.*)

ANT. Shrieks madden mine heart!

IS. Through my soul moans the keen!

ANT. All-lamented thou art!

IS. O thy measureless teen!

A. Brother-slayer—I. And slain! A. That my
tongue should have said it!—I. Mine eyes should
have seen!

970

ANT. Woes answer to woes!

IS. Ay, as yours is our plight!

ANT. IS. Ah, the Fate that bestows

Gifts void of delight!—

She, and Oedipus' shade, and the gloomy Erinnys
resistless in might.

(*Ant.*)

ANT. Dread sights did ye show—

IS. Back from exile who sped.

ANT. For the victor lies low—

980

IS. The survivor fell dead.

A. Empty-handed is loser—I. And winner!—A. O
lost house!—I. Happiness fled!

ANT. Saddest kindred of woes—

IS. Heaped up to the height!

ANT. Is. Ah, the Fate that bestows
 Gifts void of delight—
 She, and Oedipus' shade, and the gloomy Erinnys
 resistless in might.

(*Epode*)

ANT. This—for thou provedst it—'twas thine to
 learn. 990

Is. This thou didst no whit later understand.

ANT. When unto Thebes thou didst essay return—

Is. With spear in hand.

A. Horror to tell!—I. To see! A. Ah strife!

I. Ah misery!—

A. To fatherland and home!—I. And more than all
 to me!

A. O thou who hadst a lordship—in calamity!

I. Ye for whom more than all men we may
 weep! 1000

ANT. O demon-ridden ye for ruinous bane!

Is. Woe and alas! where shall we lay these twain?

ANT. In sepulchres most royal lay our slain—

Is. Ay, there to vex the sire by whom they
 sleep!

Enter Herald.

HERALD.

The pleasure and decree must I announce

Of this Kadmeian city's senators:—

To Eteokles, for his patriotism,

A grave dug in the land that loveth him;

For, beating back our city's foes, he died;

Guiltless of wrong to fanes ancestral, clear 1010

Of blame, he hath died where youths with glory die:

Such my commission is as touching him.
His brother Polyneikes' corse they bid
Cast forth unburied, for a prey to dogs,
As one who had overthrown this Kadmus' land
Except some God against his spear had stood
Opposed. His country's Gods shall even in death
Hold him polluted, for in scorn of them
He brought an alien host to capture Thebes.
Therefore decree they that his recompense 1020
Be shameful burial in maws of kites,
That no hands minister to heap for him
A mound, no wails wild-ringing honour him,
That no friends do him grace of sepulture.
Thus the Kadmeian magistrates decree.

ANTIGONE.

But I to your Kadmeian rulers say,
Though none beside lend help to bury him,
I will entomb him; I the peril dare
Of burying my brother, nor think shame
Of this my contumacy unto Thebes. 1030
How dare I slight the flesh wherefrom we sprang,
The woeful mother and the hapless sire?
Therefore with joy share thou his joyless state,
My soul, and live leal sister to thy dead.
My brother's flesh shall no lean-bellied wolves
Mangle: let no man think such thing shall be.
His tomb, the delving of his grave, myself,
Weak woman though I be, will I devise,
Yea, bear earth in my linen mantle's lap,
And hide him so: let none think contrariwise. 1040
The bold heart shall not lack the cunning hand.

HERALD.

I bid thee, thou defy not Thebes herein !

ANTIGONE.

I bid thee, waste thy warnings not on me.

HERALD.

Stern is a people newly 'scaped from ruin.

ANTIGONE.

Stern be they—he shall not unburied lie.

HERALD.

Whom Thebes abhors, wilt thou with burial honour ?

ANTIGONE.

Even I, since Gods have ceased to honour him.

HERALD.

Nay, not till he imperilled this our land.

ANTIGONE.

Evil-entreated, evil he repaid—

HERALD.

In vengeance on us all for one man's wrong ! 1050

ANTIGONE.

Contention last of all Gods ends dispute.

Him will I bury : multiply not words.

HERALD.

At thine own peril do it ! I forbid thee.

[*Exit.*

CHORUS.

O ye who glory in a line down cast,
Erinnys-fates, who have o'erthrown
Oedipus' house in such wise, to the last
Foundation-stone !
What shall be my resolve ?—how dare I fail
Thee to lament, to attend thee to the grave ?
Yet O, a people's wrath, whereat I quail, 1060
I dare not brave.

Thou—over thee shall troops of mourners bend :
All tears of sorrow shall he miss !
That only a sister's wail should him attend—
Who can brook this ?

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Nay, whatsoe'er they wreak of penalty
On Polyneikes' mourning train,
We will go with him ; to the grave will we
Escort thy slain.
This stroke hath touched the whole house—rules
of Right 1070
Mid peoples aye are wavering.

HALF-CHORUS 2.

We dare not do the state, the law, despite.
We attend the King ;
For him the Blessèd Ones and Zeus's might
Have helped, that he saved Kadmus' town
From overthrow, that alien surge of fight
Whelmed it not down.

*[Exeunt, half the chorus accompanying
Antigonè, and half Ismènè.]*



THE PERSIANS.



ARGUMENT.

XERXES, king of Persia, being set on by evil counselors to outdo the glory of his father Darius, whose army, seeking to conquer Greece, had been smitten on the field of Marathon, gathered a host exceeding great, and led them from Asia by a bridge which he had caused to be made over the Hellespont, while his fleet sailed across the Ægean Sea. And when he had forced the Pass of Thermopylæ, and had burnt the city of Athens, all his triumphs came to an end in the great sea-fight of Salamis, wherein his fleet was utterly destroyed.

And herein is told how tidings of that calamity came to Persia.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

XERXES, *king of Persia.*

ATOSSA, *mother of Xerxes.*

GHOST OF DARIUS, *father of Xerxes.*

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, *consisting of Persian nobles.*

SCENE :—*at Susa, before the palace of the king.*

THE PERSIANS.

CHORUS.

WE are the elders left, the loyal band,
When Persia sent her hosts to Hellas' strand,
 King Xerxes' palace-warders,
 Chosen his treasure-guarders,
Left by Darius' son to rule the land.

When shall it dawn, my King's returning-day?
When comes that golden-gleaming war-array
 Home?—oh, my heart is yearning
 All over-wrought—is burning
With prophet-fears of tidings of dismay!

10

For thither passed all Asia's chivalry:
Mine heart for her young hero aye doth sigh;
 For no messenger comes near us,
 Neither horseman-post to cheer us
To the city of the Persians draweth nigh.

From Susa, from Ecbatana, they went,
From the ancient Kissian fortress were they sent—
 Seamen, riders upon horses,
 Steady-tramping footman-forces
Close-marshalled in the battle-armament.

20

There were gold-abounding Sardians, and their chariot-
riders pressed
Swiftly on, with chariot-horses yoked by two, by three
abreast—
A sight of terror to the eyes that marked their
marshalling.

Came the borderers on Tmolus the hallowed, all aglow
Around the neck of Hellas the bondage-yoke to
throw : 50
There were Tharubis and Mardon, stubborn anvils
of the spear ;
There were Mysian javelin-hurlers : gold-abounding
Babylon
Sent forth a mingled multitude in long lines sweeping
on,
Riders of the sea-steeds, trusty archers void of fear.

And the people of all Asia, wielders of the scimitar,
Have followed the dread summons of the Great King
to the war.

Oh, the flower of all the Persian realm hath van-
ished from our gaze : [60
And all the land of Asia which hath fostered them
doth sigh ;
With the passion of the yearning of bereavement doth
she cry ;
And the wives and mothers shudder as they count
the weary days.

(*Str. 1.*)

For the army of the King, for the city-wasting host
Long since hath passed the channel of the fronting
neighbour-coast ;

For they linked the rafts together with the cables
cunningly,

So that Hellas' strait was spanned, 70

Land was riveted to land,

And man had cast a yoke upon the wild neck of the
sea !

(*Ant. 1.*)

And myriad-peopled Asia's King, a battle-eager lord,
From utmost east to utmost west sped on his count-
less horde

In unnumbered squadrons marching, in fleets of keels
untold,

Knowing none dared disobey,

For stern overseers were they

Of the godlike King begotten of the ancient Race of
Gold. 80

(*Str. 2.*)

And, flashing from his eyes the deadly dragon's steel-
blue glance,

On Assyrian battle-car,

With unnumbered men of war

He hurls the war-god of the bow on the heroes of the
lance.

(*Ant. 2.*)

Heroes?—none is so heroic as to stem that warrior-
flood !

Not their strongest dams shall bide

Such resistless ocean-tide :— 90

Nay, Persia's valiant myriads shall in no wise be
withstood.

(*Mesode.*)

Yet—God sendeth strong delusions, and what mortal
may evade them ?



And who with foot light-leaping may spring clear of
the snare ?

For Atê smiles alluring men, until she hath betrayed
them

Amidst her net : none breaks its meshes, once en-
tangled there. 100

(*Str.* 3.)

For the Gods' doom all-controlling decreed this long
ago—

‘ Persia's sons shall win renown

In dashing towers down,

In the clash of charging horsemen, and in cities'
overthrow.’

(*Ant.* 3.)

Yet they learned to look unquailing on the highways
of the sea,

When the flails of tempest smite, 110

And its meadows blossom white,

Grasping slender reins of army-wafting galleys fear-
lessly.

(*Str.* 4.)

Hence mine heart is wrapped in gloom,

Racked with presages of doom,

Fear for Persia's chivalry,

Lest the city hear a cry—

‘ Susa doth dispeopled lie ! ’

(*Ant.* 4.)

Lest from Kissian streets be sent

Echoes of that wild lament, 120

Wails from multitudes far-borne,

As the thronging women mourn,

As the linen robes are torn.

(Str. 5.)

All our horse with these were lost,
Lost were all our footman-host !
All have followed hence their King, as forth the hive
pour swarming bees,
Streaming o'er the human-fashioned forelands parting
neighbour seas, 130
Forelands linking coast to coast.

(Ant. 5)

Now is every marriage-bed
Drenched with tears as for the dead.
Persian wives are whelmed in sorrow : yearning each
with breaking heart
For the battle-eager spearman whom she blithely saw
depart
Sitteth lone, a wife unwed.

But come, ye Persians, sit we here beside 140
The hall of ancient pride :
Let us take loyal thought and deep for this—
Sore is the need, I wis !—
How fareth now our King, Darius' son,
Xerxes, whose ancestor and ours were one
Ages ago.

Is it the strained bow speeding arrows' flight,
Or is it the steel-headed lance's might
Hath won this fight ?

But lo, a splendour as of eyes divine, 150
Draws nigh the mother of our royal line !
I fall before her, Queen and Lady mine.
With reverent words of salutation meet
Her must we greet.



Enter Atossa.

Queen, above all Persia's deep-girt daughters set in
place of pride,
Xerxes' grey-haired mother, hail to thee, who wast
Darius' bride,
Couchmate once of Persia's god, the mother of her
god art thou,
If its ancient fortune have not fled from our army
now.

ATOSSA.

Lo, for this I come, forth pacing from mine halls be-
decked with gold,
And the bridal bower that I with King Darius shared
of old: 160
Care is fretting all mine heart, and I will utter in your
ears
This my story, friends—myself the while am thrall to
haunting fears
Lest the Wealth of Persia spurn and wreck in swift
ambition's race
All the stately fabric that Darius reared by heaven's
grace.
Sore perplexed mine heart is, vaguely haunted by con-
flicting thought—
Thinking, 'None need stand in awe of wealth, if
warriors wield it not'—
Thinking, 'On the poor, though ne'er so stalwart,
shines not victory.'
Sooth, our wealth is flawless; but I tremble aye for
Persia's Eye—
For that as the house's eye I count the presence of its
lord.

Wherefore, since the matter standeth thus, herein do
ye afford 170
Counsel unto me, ye Persians, ancient servants leal
and true,
Seeing all the prosperous issue of my counsels rests
with you.

CHORUS.

Be assured, O Persia's Queen, thou shalt not need to
name it twice,
Be it word or deed thou claimest, whereunto my
strength may rise ;
For the loyal-hearted are we whom herein thou bidd'st
advise.

ATOSSA.

By many a night-vision aye am I
Haunted, since passed my son forth, marshalling
His host to ravage yon Ionian land ;
But never aught have seen so vivid yet,
As last night's dream : lo, I will tell it thee. 180
Methought two women royal-rich arrayed—
This one in robes of Persian guise attired,
And that in Dorian—rose before mine eyes
Of queenlier stature than all living dames,
In beauty perfect, sisters of one house.
And this in Hellas dwelt, her fatherland
By heritage, and that in Asian land.
And, as meseemed I saw, some strife arose
Betwixt these twain : my son being ware thereof
Would curb and tame them, and unto his car 190
He yokes them, and he lays upon their necks
The collar : in his trappings proudly towered
This, yielding mouth submissive to the reins.

But that plunged madly, rending with her hands
The chariot-harness, dashes the bit to earth,
Swings up the yoke with fury and snaps in twain.
Then falls my son : his sire Darius stands
Compassionating him ; when Xerxes looks
On him, he rends his raiment round his limbs.
Even these things in the night I say I saw : 200
Then rose I, in the spring fair-flowing dipped
My fingers, and with incense-bearing hand
Stood at the altar, to the Averting Ones,
Whose rites are these, to burn the chrism-cake ;
When lo, an eagle flying to the hearth
Of Phœbus !—tongue-tied, friends, by fear I stood :—
Hard following him a chasing hawk I saw,
Whose wings swooped on him, and whose talons tare
His head, while nought did he but cower and yield
His body. Fearsome 'twas for me to see, 210
For you to hear. For be ye sure, my son,
Triumphant, the world's wonder shall become,
Vanquished, may be of none in question called ;
But, so he 'scape, is King in any wise.

CHORUS.

Mother, nothing would we say to fill thee overmuch
with fear
Nor with confidence : but thou with prayers unto the
Gods draw near,
That, what evil thou hast seen soe'er, they may avert
the ill,
And for thee and for thy children all the good
thereof fulfil,
And for Persia and thy friends. Thereafter pour
drink-offerings

Unto Earth and to the dead. For gracious issue of
these things 220
Pray thy lord Darius, whom thou sayest thou didst
see by night,
Even to thee to send it and thy son, from nether-
gloom to light ;
And whate'er opposes may earth's darkness swallow
and close above.
This by mine heart's divination counsel I in loyal
love :—
Yea, the general issue of thy visions fair, I rede, shall
prove.

ATOSSA.

Loyal, sooth, art thou, the first arerder of these dreams
of mine,
Who hast given sure foreboding for my son and for
my line.
May thy benison befall ! The offerings, as thou
counselest,
I will render to the Gods and those beneath who
love us best,
Soon as to the palace I return. But fain would I
know this— 230
In what spot of earth, O friends, say men that Athens
builded is ?

CHORUS.

Westward far, where wane the Sun-king's glories as
he sinketh down.

ATOSSA.

Yet my son was fain to play the hunter of such dis-
tant town ?

CHORUS.

Yea, for then should Hellas all be bowed beneath his
royal sway.

ATOSSA.

Is there found with them so vast a multitude for war's
array ?

CHORUS.

Yea, such armèd host as many an evil once to Media
wrought.

ATOSSA.

Have they aught worth warrior-warding—homes with
store of wealth full-fraught ?

CHORUS.

Silver have they, yea, a very fountain, treasure of
their land.

ATOSSA.

And their weapons—are they cunning archers strain-
ing bow in hand ?

CHORUS.

Nay, but foot to foot in fight they close with spear
and clashing shield. 240

ATOSSA.

And their shepherd—who is lord and king of these in
fighting field ?

CHORUS.

No man's servants do they name them, they are sub-
ject unto none.

ATOSSA.

How then can they stem the tide of alien foemen
surging on ?

CHORUS.

How ? So well, Darius' goodly host went down be-
fore their sword.

ATOSSA.

Fearful thoughts thy words awake in one whose son
fares thitherward !

CHORUS.

Sooth, meseems, with truth unfailing all the tale thou
soon shalt know :

Lo, a courier ; and his running seemeth Persian-like,
I trow ;

And the tidings that he beareth good or evil speed
shall show.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

O stately burgs of all the Asian land !
O Persia, haven of the world's wealth thou ! 250
How thy magnificence is by one stroke
Ruined, and Persia's flower cut down and dead !
Ah me ! ill task misfortune's herald hath :
Yet all the misery must I needs unfold.
Persians, destroyed is all the Asian host !

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

O grievous, O grievous disaster, O bane
Unforeseen ! Weep, Persians, who hear this anguish
and pain !

MESSENGER.

Yea, for their armament is all one wreck. 260
Myself beyond all hope return alive.

CHORUS.

(Ant. 1)

O too long have the days of the stricken in years
Endured, that such tidings unlooked-for should sound
in our ears!

MESSENGER.

Yea, I was there: not from another's lips,
Persians, my tale's calamities I heard.

CHORUS.

(Str. 2)

In vain, in vain, alas and alas,
Did the host of archers in one huge band
Forth from the shores of Asia pass 270
To waste the Hellene land!

MESSENGER.

With corpses heaped of men slain wretchedly
Are Salamis' beach and all the coasts thereby.

CHORUS.

(Ant. 2)

Alas and alas for thy tale of these,
Dear friends sea-whelmed, tossed to and fro,
Dead forms that sway with the tumbling seas
In their endless ebb and flow!

MESSENGER.

Nothing availed our bows, but all the host
Perished, borne down by charging galley-prows.

CHORUS.

(Str. 3)

Shrill forth the lamentation-cry, 280
 The misery of Persia lost !
 How all things fell disastrously
 When perished Asia's host !

MESSENGER.

O hate of hate, that name of Salamis !
 Ah, how remembering Athens do I groan !

CHORUS.

(Ant. 3)

O Athens, loathed of us that mourn !
 O ever-haunting memory
 Of Persian widows love-forlorn
 Unnumbered, stricken of thee !

ATOSSA.

Long have I held my peace, disaster-stunned, 290
 Heart-wrung : too great is this calamity
 To suffer speech or questioning of woes.
 Yet mortals needs must sufferings endure
 That Gods send. Calm thee now ; speak out, and all
 The wretched tale unfold, howe'er thou groan.
 Who is not dead ? For whom shall we lament
 Of chieftains that, to sceptred rule assigned,
 Have died, and headless left their war-array ?

MESSENGER.

Yet liveth Xerxes' self, and seeth light.

ATOSSA.

Oh mighty light of safety to mine house ! 300
 O dayspring out of black night rising fair !

MESSENGER.

Artembares, of myriad horsemen chief,
Is dashed on rugged rocks Silenian ;
And, captain of a thousand, Dadakes
Stabbed with the spear leapt lightly from his ship.
And Tenagon, lord of Baktrians native-born,
Now haunts the sea-lashed shores of Aias' Isle.
Lilaius, Arsames, Argestes third,
Even these around the culver-cradling isle,
Surf-vexed, are tumbled on the iron strand. 310
That neighbour to the springs of Egypt's Nile
Arkteus, Adeues, and Pheresseues,
Pharnuchus—out of one ship all these fell.
Metallus, chief of Chrysa's thousands ten,
Distained his breadth of tawny tangled beard,
Dying, and all to crimson changed its hue.
Arabian Magus, Baktrian Artames,
Captain of thrice ten thousand horsemen swart,
Made that rough coast his new home—perished there.
Amestris, Amphistreus, whose spear in fight 320
Sore toiled, stout Ariomardus who bequeathed
Sorrow to Sardis, Mysian Seisames,
Tharybis, chief of five times fifty keels,
Lyrnæan-born, a passing-goodly man,
Lies, hapless one, who died a wretched death.
Syennesis, in heroism first,
Cilicia's lord, who of our champions most
Dealt scathe to foes, right gloriously died.
Of such as these I make brief mention now,
And tell few ills of many that befell. 330

ATOSSA.

Alas ! misfortune's crown is this I hear,

Shame for the Persians, wailings wild and high !
Yet turn thou back again, and tell me this—
How great was the array of Hellene ships,
That these presumed against the Persian host
To clash in battle with the charging prows.

MESSENGER.

Might numbers have availed, our side, be sure,
Had conquered ; for the full tale of the ships
Of Hellas was but thirty ten times told,
And, therebeside, of chosen barks but ten. 340
But Xerxes, well I know, a thousand had
Whose throng he led ; the keels of peerless speed
Were hundreds two and seven : so stands the tale.
Seem we to thee herein o'ermatched for fight ?

ATOSSA.

Why then, some God destroyed our armament,
Who weighed war's balance down with adverse doom !

MESSENGER.

Ay, the Gods ward the Goddess Pallas' town.

ATOSSA.

Ha ! and is Athens-town unwasted yet ?

MESSENGER.

Sooth, while her men live, stands her bulwark firm.

ATOSSA.

Tell how began the conflict of the ships. 350
Who made first onset ? Was it Hellas' folk,
Or my son, glorying in his host of ships ?

MESSENGER.

'Twas this began all our disaster, Queen :
A demon or fell fiend rose—who knows whence ?—
For from the Athenian host a Hellene came,
And to thy son, to Xerxes, told this tale,
That when the mirk of black night should be come,
The Greeks would not abide, but, leaping straight
Upon the galley-thwarts, this way and that
In stealthy flight would seek to save their lives. 360
Soon as he heard, discerning neither guile
In that Greek, nor the jealousy of heaven,
This word to all his captains he proclaims,
That, when the sun should cease to scorch the earth,
And gloom should fill the hallowed space of sky,
In three lines should they range their throng of ships
To guard each pass, each seaward-surgings strait ;
And others should enring all Aias' Isle :
Since, if the Greeks should yet escape fell doom,
And find their ships some privy path of flight, 370
Doomed to the headsman all these captains were.
Thus spake he, in spirit over-confident,
Knowing not what the Gods would bring to pass.
With hearts obedient, in no disarray,
Then supped our crews, and every mariner
To the well-rounded rowlock lashed his oar.
But when the splendour faded of the sun,
And night came on, each master of the oar
A-shipboard went, and every man-at-arms.
Then rank to rank of long ships passed the word : 380
And, as was each appointed, so they sailed.
So all night long the captains of the ships
Kept all the sea-host sailing to and fro.

And night passed by, yet did the Hellene host
Essay in no wise any secret flight.
But when the day by white steeds chariot-borne,
Radiant to see, flooded all earth with light,
First from the Hellenes did a clamorous shout
Ring for a triumph-chant ; and wild and high
Pealed from the island rock the answering cheer 390
Of Echo. Thrilled through all our folk dismay
Of baffled expectation ; for the Greeks
Not as for flight that holy pæan sang,
But straining battleward with heroic hearts.
The trumpet's blare set all their lines aflame.
Straightway with chiming dip of dashing oars
They smote the loud brine to the timing-cry,
And suddenly flashed they all full into view.
Foremost their right wing seemly-ordered led
In fair array ; next, all their armament 400
Battleward swept on. Therewithal was heard
A great shout—' On, ye sons of Hellas, on !
Win for the home-land freedom !—freedom win
For sons, wives, temples of ancestral Gods,
And old sires' graves ! This day are all at stake !'
Yea, and from us low thunder of Persian cheers
Answered—no time it was for dallying !
Then straightway galley dashed her beak of bronze
On galley. 'Twas a Hellene ship began
The onset, and shore all the figure-head 410
From a Phœnician :—captain charged on captain.
At first the Persian navy's torrent-flood
Withstood them : but when our vast fleet was cramped
In strait space—friend could lend no aid to friend,—
Then ours by fangs of allies' beaks of bronze
Were struck, and shattered all their oar-array ;

While with shrewd strategy the Hellene ships
Swept round, and rammed us, and upturned were
hulls

Of ships ;—no more could one discern the sea,
Clogged all with wrecks and limbs of slaughtered
men : 420

The shores, the rock-reefs, were with corpses strewn.
Then rowed each bark in fleeing disarray,
Yea, every keel of our barbarian host.

They with oar-fragments and with shards of wrecks
Smote, hacked, as men smite tunnies, or a draught
Of fishes ; and a moaning, all confused
With shrieking, hovered wide o'er that sea-brine
Till night's dark presence blotted out the horror.
That swarm of woes, yea, though for ten days' space
I should rehearse, could I not tell in full. 430

Yet know this well, that never in one day
Died such a host, such tale untold, of men.

ATOSSA.

Alas ! a mighty sea of ills hath burst
O'er Persia, o'er the whole barbarian race.

MESSENGER.

Know well, but half-told yet is our disaster.
Such visitation came on them of woe
As to outweigh twice over all I spake.

ATOSSA.

Now what mischance could come more dire than this ?
O tell what visitation meanest thou,
Weighted with heavier doom, that smote the host. 440

MESSENGER.

All that of Persia's sons were goodliest,
In heart most valiant, first in pride of birth,
And to the King's self chief in loyalty,
By piteous and inglorious doom have died.

ATOSSA.

Woe's me for this dire visitation, friends!
By what doom did these perish, sayest thou?

MESSENGER.

An isle there is that fronteth Salamis' coast,
Small, where no ship finds haven, and its beach
By Pan is haunted, lover of the dance.
Hither our King sent these, that when our foes 450
From shattered ships should flee unto the isle,
They might, as in a trap, slay Hellas' host,
And from the swift sea-currents rescue friends—
Ill boding that which should be!—for when God
Gave that sea-battle's glory to the Greeks,
On that same day they lapped their limbs in mail
Of gleaming bronze, leapt from their ships, beset
The isle all round, to the end these might not know
Which way to face. With stones from hands of foes
On all sides battered were they: arrows leapt 460
From twanging bowstrings aye, and smote them dead.
Last, with one surge-sweep charging burst o'er them
The Hellenes, stabbing, hacking wretched limbs,
Till they had torn out life from each and all.
Then Xerxes shrieked to see that depth of woe:
For full in³view of all the host his throne
Stood on a high knoll hard beside the sea.

He rent his vesture, wild and high he wailed.
Straight to the land-host sent he forth his hest,
And sped them fleeing thence in disarray. 470
Such woe uppled on woe is thine to moan.

ATOSSA.

Malignant dæmon, how hast thou beguiled
The Persians' hearts ! How bitter to my son
His vengeance was on Athens, nor sufficed
Whom Marathon erst slew of Asia's folk ;
Whom thinking to avenge, my son hath drawn
Down on his head such multitude of ills !
But of the ships that 'scaped tell thou the fate.
Where didst thou leave them ? Canst thou clearly
say ?

MESSENGER.

The captains of that remnant in wild haste 480
Before the wind took flight in disarray.
But in Bœotia day by day fast died
Our land-host. Round the bright springs struggling
some
Thirst-frenzied, fell ; some, spent with panting flight,
Into the Phocians' land far onward pressed,
On, on, by Doris and the Melian gulf,
Where with boon stream Spercheius laves the plain.
Thereafter did Achaia's soil receive
Our famished multitudes, the burg withal
Of the Thessalians : there full many died 490
Of thirst and hunger : yea, these both befell.
To the Magnesian land, to Macedon,
We came, unto the river Axios,
To Bolbé's marshy reeds, Pangaion's ridge,

The land Edonian. On that day a God
 Brought winter on untimely, freezing all
 The stream of sacred Strymon. Who till then
 Believed in no gods, prayed in that dark hour,
 Yea, with strong crying worshipped Heaven and
 Earth.

Then, when from many supplications ceased 500
 The host, they fell to cross the ice-bound flood.
 And whoso of us, ere the sun-god's rays
 Burst forth, set out, even he escaped alive ;
 For his bright orb outflaming with his beams
 Thawed the mid-channel, heating it with fire.
 In heaps engulfed they sank : most happy he
 Whose strangled breath the earliest snapped life's
 thread.

So many as survived and safety won
 Through Thrace with toil exceeding hardly passed,
 And, so escaped, are come—small remnant they !—510
 Back to the home-land, so that Persia's streets
 Moan, sorrowing for our country's best-beloved.
 All this is true : yet much do I pass by
 Of ills that God on Persia's land hath hurled.

[*Exit.*

CHORUS.

O irresistible God, how heavily
 Thy feet have leapt on all the Persian race !

ATOSSA.

Woe's me for our great war-host's utter wreck !
 O vision of night's dream made manifest now,
 How all too plainly didst thou bode me bane !
 How passing ill interpreters were ye ! 520

Yet, seeing that your sentence thus advised,
I am minded first to pray unto the Gods,
Then, for my gift to Earth and to the dead,
Will I bring forth mine halls the hallowed cake.
I know that for a lost cause this I do :
Yet haply may a brighter future dawn.
And ye must, looking unto what is done,
Take loyal counsel with the loyal-souled.
If hither come my son ere I return,
Comfort him, and escort him to his halls, 530
Lest to ills past he add yet greater ills.

CHORUS.

Zeus, King of Kings, the whole array
Of populous Persia, who flung high
Her vaunts, hast thou destroyed this day !
Ecbatana and Susa lie
Beneath a cloud of sorrow bowed :
And veils are by the soft hands torn
Of many a maiden, while they mourn,
And drench with tears in torrent flow
Their bosoms, sharing the land's woe. 540
The eyes of Persia's brides, low-wailing
Their lords, are with love's vigil failing :
From widowed bride-beds sumptuous-strown
They turn, for lost joys passion-burning,
They cry for young love ceaseless-yearning.
The drear doom of the unreturning
With them I moan.

(Str. 1)

Now Asia-land, on every hand
Dispeopled, mourns her lost.

Xerxes to war led forth afar, 550
And Xerxes lost, that host ;
And Xerxes brought all things to nought
In those barks ruin-tossed.
Ah, why was not the chief who ne'er
Failed, king Darius, leader there,
A marshaller of bow and spear
To Susa dear ?

(*Ant.* 1)

The winged ships bore to that far shore
In dark-prowed level flight
The men-at-arms, the seaman-swarms— 560
Those ships slew all in fight !
O ships that crashed in ruin dashed !
O grim Ionian might !
Yea, now hath scarce escaped, we hear,
Our King himself o'er moorlands drear
And perilous storm-tormented ways
Of wintry Thrace.

(*Str.* 2)

And they that were first for death to reap,
Abandoned of sore need there
Round Kychreia's steep doth the tide-race sweep— 570
Ah, groan with rending of hair !
Peal the deep-voiced lament ;
Let our crying be upward sent,
Till the pitiless heaven be rent
With the wailing of our despair !

(*Ant.* 2)

They are mangled in dread sea-whirlpits wild,
And the flesh that we loved is torn
By the dumb-lipped child of the Undeiled !
For its lord doth the void home mourn ;

And the childless fathers cry 580
In a passion of agony,
As the stroke that hath fall'n from on high
Now first to their ears is borne.

(*Str.* 3)

And the folk in the land of Asia dwelling
Will submit them no more unto Persia's sway ;
No more 'neath a master's strong compelling
Will these as of old their tribute pay,
Neither bending the brow to the dust shall they bow
To our rule, for the might of the Great King now
Hath passed away. 590

(*Ant.* 3)

And the chain that fettered the tongue is broken,
The malapert tongue, and the rabble is free
To prate of its discontent outspoken ;
For unbound is the yoke of sovereignty,
Since Aias' Isle on its blood-drenched soil
Holdeth all that to Persia remained from the spoil
Of the girdling sea.

(*Re-enter Atossa.*)

ATOSSA.

Friends, whoso hath experience of ills
Knoweth that when a surge of ills hath come
On mortals, we are wont to be all fears : 600
When smooth the stream of fortune flows, we trust
That evermore the same fair wind shall blow.
So, in mine eyes all terror-lowering now
Appear the adverse purposes of Heaven,
And 'tis no pæan thundereth in mine ears :
Such horror of disaster scares my soul.

So without rolling chariots have I trod
 Back from mine halls this path, nor with the pomp
 Of old, with offerings propitiatory
 To my son's sire, such things as charm the dead : 610
 A consecrated heifer's sweet white milk,
 And the flower-toiler's essence, lucent honey,
 With limpid sprayings from a virgin spring,
 And the wild mother's unpolluted flow,
 Even this, the glory of the ancient vine ;
 And lo, the fragrant fruit of her that blooms
 In fadeless leaf, the olive silver-green,
 And flower-festoons, babes of all-mother earth.
 Now, friends, with these drink-offerings chant ye hymns
 To the Death-powers, and on Darius call, 620
 The deified, while to those nether Gods
 I pour these honours through the lips of earth.

[Goes to the tomb in the centre of the stage.]

CHORUS.

Lady and Queen, all Persia's veneration,
 To those dim halls be thy drink-offerings sped :
 We will in litanies make supplication,
 That graciously they hear our invocation
 The Warders of the dead.
 Death-powers, 'neath earth your presence pure con-
 cealing,
 Send up this ghost unto the light revealing !
 Earth, Hermes, and thou, King of Spirits, send ! 630
 He of our ills, if he knows any healing,
 Alone can tell the end.

(Str. 1)

Doth my godlike King, from his throne mid the bless-
 ed ones, hearken my moan,

As I ring out loud and clear
 Weird cadences rising and falling
 Of the heart-rending voice of my calling
 Wrung out by mine anguish appalling?
 From the nethergloom, ah, doth he hear?

(*Ant.* 1)

O Earth, vouchsafe him, and ye, O Lords of the Dead,
 unto me, 640

The Susa-begotten, our god!
 The bands of the grave O sever
 For the mighty spirit, for ever
 Glorious, whose peer yet never
 Was laid 'neath the Persian sod!

(*Str.* 2)

Ah, dear was our lord, and his dust is adored, for a
 dear heart under his grave-mound lies.

Aïdoneus, King of the Nethergloom, bring him
 hither, vouchsafe that Darius rise— 650

Darius, great as in kingly state we beheld him of old
 with reverent eyes!

(*Ant.* 2)

For never he lost a warrior-host through infatuate
 folly's strategy,

But Persia acclaimed him, for war-rede famed, 'a
 god:' yea, in counsel a god was he

In veriest deed; for our hosts did he lead from victory
 on unto victory.

(*Str.* 3)

King, ancient King, come, rise to our sight,
 Step forth on thine earth-mound's topmost height.

Uplift thou thy sandal saffron-golden: 660

Be thy royal tiara of us beholden:
 Rise, father benignant, Darius, to light,

(Ant. 3)

That of anguish unheard-of and strange thou mayst
hear:

O lord of lords, to thy servants appear !

For over the land doth a hell-mist hover,

For the pall of death doth our young sons cover :—

Darius, benignant sire, draw near !

(Epode.)

Arise ! arise !

O thou whose death with tears dimmed many eyes !

Wherefore, O thou who wearest now the crown,

By reason of the fruit thy folly bore

To all this land, were those tall ships whelmed down—

Ships that are ships no more, no more ? 680

The Ghost of Darius appears above the tomb.

DARIUS.

Faithful among the faithful, Persians old,

Friends of my youth, what troubles vex the state ?

The land sighs, beats her breast, and rends her
cheeks:

And, seeing nigh my tomb my wife, I fear ;

And I accept the oblations graciously.

And ye are mourning, standing nigh my tomb,

And, shrilling high the wails that raise the dead,

Piteously call me whence 'tis hard to pass,

Chiefly because the Gods beneath the earth

Are readier to receive than to release.

690

Yet, since among the dead I was a king,

I come. Haste, that none blame me for delay.

What is this new ill crushing Persia's sons ?

CHORUS.

For awe I cannot meet thy gaze,
For awe I cannot face to face
Speak, for the dread of olden days.

DARIUS.

Nay, but since from Hades I have risen spell-drawn
by thy wail,
Nowise lengthen out a tedious speech, but close in
brief thy tale ;
Tell unto the ending all, nor thou from ancient
reverence quail.

CHORUS.

I fear to do thy will, I fear
To speak, O thou whom I revere :
My tale is ill for friends to hear. 700

DARIUS.

Nay then, since beneath the ancient awe thy spirit
still doth cower,
Agèd Queen, to thee I turn, the sharer of my bridal
bower.
Cease from these thy tears and lamentations : give
me answer now
Clearly. Humankind's afflictions needs must light
on men, I trow ;
Ills in multitude on sea, in multitude on shore, on
man
Surely fall, as oft as life is stretched beyond the
wonted span.

ATOSSA.

Thou, who didst surpass the bliss of all men in thine
happy fate,
Thou who, while thou lookedst on the sunlight, in thy
royal state 710
Envied of the Persians livedst like a God in happi-
ness ;
Blest art thou in dying ere thou sawest evil's sorest
stress !
For, Darius,—thou shalt in a moment's telling hear
the tale,—
Persia's cause is, one may say it, wholly brought to
utter bale.

DARIUS.

How befell it? Came there blast of pestilence, or
civic brawl?

ATOSSA.

Nay, not so, but all our hosts in strife with Athens
slain did fall.

DARIUS.

Ha! what son of mine hath thither led his armies?—
answer me.

ATOSSA.

Reckless Xerxes: all the mainland he dispeopled
utterly.

DARIUS.

Crossing land or sea did he, the hapless, make this
mad essay?

ATOSSA.

Both : a two-fold battle-front there was, a double war-
array. 720

DARIUS.

Yea ?—but how did hosts so mighty cross afoot from
shore to shore ?

ATOSSA.

Hellé's sea-gorge with his engines bridged he, stretched
a highway o'er.

DARIUS.

And he wrought the deed, to bar the gates of mighty
Bosporus ?

ATOSSA.

Even so : some dæmon was it helped him when he
purposed thus.

DARIUS.

Woe ! a mighty dæmon met him, making his discern-
ment dim !

ATOSSA.

So may all behold the evil issue brought to pass of him.

DARIUS.

And for them—how fared the armies over whom ye
thus make moan ?

ATOSSA.

By the ruin of the war-ships was the land-host over-
thrown.

DARIUS.

How!—so utterly was all the people by the spear
destroyed?

ATOSSA.

Yea, and Susa's city sigheth, made of all her manhood
void.

DARIUS.

Woe for all our loyal helpers, strong defenders, Persia's
host ! 730

ATOSSA.

Yea, and all the folk of Bactria, young and lusty men,
are lost.

DARIUS.

Wretch!—what gallant youth of allied lands to ruin
down he drew!

ATOSSA.

Yea, and Xerxes lone and desolate, they say, with
followers few—

DARIUS.

Came unto what end, and where? Was any way of
safety found?

ATOSSA.

Gladly reached the bridge whereby was Europe unto
Asia bound.

DARIUS.

And escaped alive to this our Persian mainland—true
is this?

ATOSSA.

Yea, hereof report authentic holds: gainsaying none
there is.

DARIUS.

Woe!—the oracles' fulfilment swiftly came, and on
my line

Zeus hath flashed their boding's issue down as light-
ning! Hope was mine 740

That the God would work in far-off ages their accom-
plishment.

Ah, but when one hasteth ruinward, Heaven speedeth
his descent!

Now, meseems, for all we love hath been unsealed a
fount of ill.

This my son in ignorance of youthful rashness did
fulfil,

He who thought, as one should bind a slave, in chains
to fetter so

Bosporus, the stream divine, and Hellespontus' sacred
flow,

And would make the flood his vassal, did with ham-
mered gyves enfold

Titan limbs, and made a highway broad for his array
untold.

Mortal he, he deemed in folly he should gain the
masterdom

Over all the Gods and o'er Poseidon! Did not mad-
ness come 750

Then upon my son? I fear me, lest the fruit of all
my toil,

All my garnered wealth, be reaped of foes, the first
marauder's spoil.

ATOSSA.

Such the lesson was that reckless Xerxes learned by
lending ear
Unto evil men : they told him that thou gatheredst
with the spear
For thy children mighty riches, but he drew a
coward's sword
Safe at home, and nothing added to his father's
treasure-hoard.
So he hearkened to the mocking sneer of many an
evil tongue,
Planned the march to Hellas, mustered that unnum-
bered battle-throng.

DARIUS.

So then by them a work hath been achieved
Great, memorable !—such ruin as ne'er before 760
Hath fallen on Susa and dispeopled her,
Since King Zeus this prerogative vouchsafed
That over all sheep-bearing Asia one
Should sway a sceptre of authority.
For first a Mede was captain of the host ;
His son brought to completion his great work ;
For wisdom was the helmsman of his soul.
Cyrus the third from him, the Fortunate,
Was King, and gave to all his people peace,
Subduing Lydia and the Phrygian folk, 770
And bringing all Ionia 'neath his sway ;
Since, for his wisdom, God abhorred him not.
Fourth captain of our host was Cyrus' son,
And Mardos fifth, a shame unto our land
And to the ancient throne : but him by guile

Brave Artaphernes in his palace slew,
Holpen of friends, who took this charge on them.
Then I attained the lot which I desired,
And with my great host marched to many a war, 780
Yet upon Persia never brought such scathe.
But young is my son Xerxes, rash as young,
And my commands he keepeth not in mind.
For, know this well, O ye mine olden friends,
All we together which have worn the crown
Shall not be shown to have brought such ill to pass.

CHORUS.

What then, O King Darius? Whither tends
The issue of thy words? From this their plight
How shall the Persian nation be redeemed?

DARIUS.

By marching never against Hellas-land, 790
Not though the Median host outnumber theirs;
For the land's self doth fight upon their side.

CHORUS.

How mean'st thou this?—doth in what manner fight?

DARIUS.

Slaying by famine overwhelming hosts.

CHORUS.

Then will we send a chosen troop well-found.

DARIUS.

Ah, but not even the array that stays
In Hellas now shall find safe home-return.

CHORUS.

How?—is not all the Asian army now
Crossing from Europe over Hellé's strait?

DARIUS.

Few out of many, if one must believe 800
 Heaven's oracles, marking what are now accomplished.
 Think not, part are fulfilled, part unfulfilled.
 If this be so, by empty hopes beguiled
 He leaveth there the choice of his array:
 They linger where Asopus' fountains lave
 Bœotia's plain with boon fertility.
 There waiteth them disaster's deepest depth,
 Requiring insolence and godless pride.
 For these, to Hellas coming, did not fear
 To tear down statues, burn the fanes of Gods: 810
 Altars have vanished; hurled in ruin-heaps
 Gods' temples from their basements are upheaved.
 Therefore do those ill-doers suffer ills
 Not less, and some are yet to come: not yet
 The dregs of woe are reached; the cup brims still;
 So huge a slaughter-oozing swath shall load
 Plataea's soil, reaped by the Dorian spear.
 To the third generation heaps of dead,
 Dumb mouths, shall speak unto the eyes of men
 This—' Overweening let not mortal be; 820
 ' For proud presumption's flower hath for fruit
 ' Infatuate sin, whose harvest is all tears.
 ' When this requital for those deeds ye see,
 ' On Athens think and Hellas then: let none,
 ' Disdaining present fortune, coveting
 ' Other, the cup of his prosperity spill.

‘ Zeus sits above, a chastener of thoughts
‘ Exceeding proud, a stern inquisitor.’
Wherefore, since Heaven’s warning bids be prudent,
Admonish him with counsel of wise speech 830
To cease from flouting Gods with reckless pride.
Thou, Xerxes’ grey-haired mother well-beloved,
Pass to yon halls, and fitting vesture take
Wherewith to meet thy son ; for now, through grief
For ills, the rendings of his rich attire
In tattered shreds about his body hang.
Thou therefore calm his soul with kindly speech :
Thee only, I wot, will he endure to hear.
But I beneath earth’s gloom now pass away.
And, ancients, fare ye well—yea, howso stricken, 840
Yet give your hearts to pleasure day by day ;
For to the dead is wealth of no avail.

[*Descends.*

CHORUS.

Sore is mine anguish, as I hear the woes
Untold of Asia, present and to come.

ATOSSA.

Fortune, how many bitter sorrows fall
On me!—and deepest rankles this mischance,
When of the shame I hear that clothes my son
Even in the vesture that enfolds his form.
I will pass in, and from the palace take
Raiment, and so essay to meet my son. 850
Our dearest will we not in woes forsake.

[*Exit.*

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Ah me ! what blessings then we knew, what bliss of
ordered life,

When, with all-mastering hand,
He, our benignant ancient King, resistless still in
strife,

Darius, ruled the land !

(Ant. 1)

He showed the world arms glory-crowned, and laws
as castles strong

Guided all feet aright : 860

And back from all our wars we fared, unworn, un-
scathed of wrong,

Homeward in prosperous plight.

(Str. 2)

He crossed not Halys' stream, yet towns untold before
him fell,

Went not from his realm forth,
Yet folk of Acheloïd isles, by Strymon-sea that dwell
Nigh Thracians of the north, 870

(Ant. 2)

Burgs oversea, with towers begirt, on that wide con-
tinent,

Heard from his lips their fate ;
And towns that fringe broad Hellê's strait, Propontis-
sea land-pent,

And Pontus' iron gate ;

(Str. 3)

And the isles off the north-west foreland, with surges
of sea washed round, 880

Which near unto this land lie, [crowned ;
Such as are Lesbos and Chios, and Samos the olive-

Yea, Mykonos, Paros, and Naxos, and Tenos there be
found,

And Andros hard thereby.

(*Ant.* 3)

Yea, under his sceptre subdued were the isles 'twixt
sea and sea,

Even Lemnos and Ikaros, 890

Rhodes, Knidus, the cities of Cyprus, as Paphos and
Soli, and she

That was mother and namesake of Salamis' isle, which
was destined to be

Cause wherefore we wail for our loss.

(*Epode.*)

And the heritage fair of Ionians, where rich populous
Hellene cities are,

By his wisdom he bowed beneath his sway, 900

While ever beside him swept the tide resistless of
warriors harnessed for war,

And of allies withal a mingled array.

But now do we lie—who dares deny?—'neath the
frown of a God, 'neath an evil star,

Whom the sea-fight utterly crushed in a day!

Enter Xerxes.

XERXES.

Hapless am I, who on this, an inscrutable doom, have
lighted! 910

Ruthlessly Fate on my people hath swooped—woe!
what shall betide me?

As I look on these reverend elders the strength of my
limbs is blighted.

Oh Zeus, that on me with our lost ones death's pall
had descended to hide me!

CHORUS.

Alas, O King, for the goodly host, and for Persia's
 honour, of old so great,
 For the fair array of the heroes lost, the harvest reap-
 ed by the reaper Fate!

920

(Pro-ode.)

And the land crieth out for her young sons killed
 For Xerxes' sake; for 'tis he that hath filled
 Hades with Persians! To Hades descending
 Passed many, the flower of the land, bow-bending
 Heroes all, for a throng past numbering
 Of men in the sleep of death are slumbering—
 Woe for the stout strength brought to an ending!
 O King of the land, the Asian nation
 To her knees is stricken in desolation.

930

XERXES.

(Str. 1)

Woe and alas! lo, here I stand
 Through whom mine house is fortune-banned,
 I, born for a curse to my fatherland!

CHORUS.

To greet thine home-coming the woeful cry
 That shall ring with a sinister note in thine ears
 As of Mariandynian keen, raise I,
 The shriek, the moan that is choked with tears.

XERXES.

(Ant. 1)

O yea, that dismal lament chant ye,
 That cry of ill omen, for suddenly
 Fortune hath turned and hath smitten me!

940

CHORUS.

Lo, lo, I will ring out wailing loud
For a nation's woe, for the sore sea-stroke,
For a land bereaved o'er her dear dead bowed,
A voice of lamenting that tear-floods choke.

XERXES.

(Str. 2)

For the fickle Battle-dæmon
Thrilled the Ionians with his might : 950
'Neath their armoured prows our seamen
Whelmed he, reft he from our sight,
Ravaging the darkling sea-plain and the accurséd
beach that night.

CHORUS.

Cry, and ask of every one—
Where be all thy friends this day ?
Where be all thy champions gone ?
Susas, Psammis, where, ah say !
Dotamas and Pelagon,
Pharandákes, where be they ?—
Agdabátes, Susiskánes, with Ecbatana's array ? 960

XERXES.

(Ant. 2)

Dead are they : I left, I left them
Fallen from the Tyrian ship,
Where the spears of life bereft them,
By the fierce sea's crimsoned lip
Dashed on rugged cliffs of Salamis in death's relent-
less grip.

CHORUS.

Woe! Where is Pharnuchus then?
 Ariomardus battle-fain?
 Where Seualkes king of men?
 Where Lilaius' princely strain?
 Memphis, Tharubis?—ah, when 970
 Shall we see that gallant train,
 See Masistes, Artembâres, see Hystaichmus' face
 again?

XERXES. (Str. 3)

Woe is me! that loathed town,
 Athens old, did they descry:—
 Now in sea-surf up and down
 Swaying helpless hands, they lie
 Where upon the strand they gasped their spirits forth
 in agony.

CHORUS.

Where is he, thy faithful-souled 980
 Eye, O King, Alpistus? Where
 He who marshalled hosts untold,
 Bastanochus' son? Declare!
 Parthus, Megabates' heir,
 Oibâres giantlike—didst leave them?—woe for this
 proud land's despair!

XERXES. (Ant. 3)

Passion of yearning pain dost thou
 Wake for these my brave allies,
 While I tell of ruin now,
 Unforgotten miseries. 990
 Oh, mine heart within his fleshly prison wails with
 bitter cries!

CHORUS.

Others yearn we for, alas!—
Xanthis, Mardians' onset-star,
For Diaixis, Ancharas,
For Arsákes' battle-car,
Kedadátas, Lytimnas,
Tolmos' quenchless thirst for war;
Much I marvel these behind thy chariot-tent no longer
are. 1000

XERXES. (Str. 4.)

No!—ah, they are gone, those chiefs of mine host!

CHORUS.

Ah, gone!—and by death inglorious!

XERXES.

Alas and alas! woe's me for the lost!

CHORUS.

Alas and alas, ye Lords of Fate,
A blow unforeseen have ye dealt to our state!
With what look hath the Ruin-fiend glared on us!

XERXES. (Ant. 4.)

We are smitten—long, long to be crushed 'neath the
blow.

CHORUS.

Smitten—in all men's sight fell the stroke.

XERXES.

All unforeseen cometh woe on woe! 1010

CHORUS.

The Ionian men, the kings of the sea,
We encountered to our calamity :—
Oh, hapless in war is the Persian folk !

XERXES. (Str. 5.)

'Tis all too true ; this stricken host is a very part of
me

CHORUS.

Yea, verily, what is not lost of Persia's chivalry ?

XERXES.

See'st this poor remnant of mine armament ?

CHORUS.

I see it—oh, I see !

XERXES.

This quiver whence the arrow-rain was sent ? 1020

CHORUS.

Why speak of this, the one thing saved to thee ?

XERXES.

A treasure-house filled once with shafts of war.

CHORUS.

Few, few indeed of many there be left !

XERXES.

Even so of helpers are we now bereft.

CHORUS.

No battle-blenchers these Ionians are !

XERXES. (Ant. 5.)

Yea, all too brave were they: on bane undreamt-of
looked mine eye.

CHORUS.

Thou meanest when on that sea-plain the galleys
turned to fly?

XERXES.

Yea, for that black mischance my robes I tore.

CHORUS.

I raise a bitter cry!

XERXES.

One cry alone for this?—nay, more, far more! 1030

CHORUS.

O yea, twice, thrice, I send it shrilling high.

XERXES.

With pain to us, joy to our foes, it blends.

CHORUS.

Yea, lopped the nation's strength is, and brought low.

XERXES.

Stripped bare of royal retinue I go—

CHORUS.

By reason of that sea-ruin of thy friends.

XERXES. (Str. 6.)

Weep, weep for this our grief! Now to the palace
pass.

CHORUS.

Alas for woe on woe, alas !

XERXES.

In wails that echo mine thy voice uplift ! 1040

CHORUS.

'Tis sorrow's gift to sorrow—wretched gift !

XERXES.

Shriek unto my lament thine antiphon !

CHORUS.

Woe and alas, I moan, I moan !

Heavy in sooth this our misfortune is :

Ay me ! full bitterly I grieve for this.

XERXES. (Ant. 6)

Wave hands that smite the breast, and groan for
sympathy !

CHORUS.

Distressful all, I weep for thee.

XERXES.

Now echoing mine be thy laments outpoured.

CHORUS.

Even this is all my thought, O King and Lord.

XERXES.

Now in laments high-shrieking still wail on. 1050

CHORUS.

Woe and alas ! I moan, I moan !

Blended with moan blows on my breast shall hail

Followed by livid bruise and bitter wail.

XERXES.

(Str. 7)

Ay, smite the breast, the Mysian keen raise ye.

CHORUS.

O misery, O misery !

XERXES.

Ravage, I bid thee, all thy beard of snow.

CHORUS.

I tear it forth by handfuls in my woe.

XERXES.

Shriek wild and high !

CHORUS.

That will I even so.

XERXES.

(Ant. 7)

Rend with thine hands the folds thy breast that
veil.

1060

CHORUS.

' Misery, misery ! ' I wail.

XERXES.

And tear thine hair for all that host laid low.

CHORUS.

I tear it forth by handfuls in my woe.

XERXES.

Let thine eyes weep !

CHORUS.

My tears in torrents flow.



XERXES.

(Epode)

Shriek unto my lament thine antiphon.

CHORUS.

Woe and alas, I moan, I moan !

XERXES.

Pass to the palace now with lamentation.

CHORUS.

Oh Persian soil, oh path of desolation !

XERXES.

Ay, o'er the city peal thy crying !

1070

CHORUS.

Ay, o'er the land grief's voice is flying.

XERXES.

Moan, softly treading, ye of lordly station.

CHORUS.

Oh Persian soil, oh path of desolation !

XERXES.

Woe, woe for those that perished in the gallant ships !

CHORUS.

Lo, I escort thee on, with wails on stricken lips.

[Exeunt Omnes.]

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